



Bellflower Unified School District

Media Release

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CONTACT: Valerie Martinez, William Diepenbrock 909-445-1001

Bellflower Unified Names Home Education Instructor as Teacher of Year

BELLFLOWER – A home education teacher known for her dedication to honing her craft, helping colleagues improve and unwavering faith in her students' abilities was named Bellflower Unified's 2017 Teacher of the Year on Wednesday, May 10.

Leah Moak, an 11-year teacher in Bellflower Unified, transferred to the District's Las Flores Home Education Independent Study Academy in 2015-16 as a way of challenging herself to continue growing as a teacher.

A former instructional coach in English language arts, she has been praised for her openness in seeking feedback on her own teaching and her ability to help other teachers grow.

"Leah teaches from the heart and, as a result, is able to make great gains with even the most challenging students because they know that she loves them and will do all she can to ensure they succeed," said Las Flores Principal Tami Zylla, who nominated Moak for the honor.

Moak was surprised with the news during a flag assembly on May 10 by her Las Flores colleagues, principal and Bellflower Unified Superintendent Dr. Brian Jacobs. Other district leaders were also in attendance for the recognition and joined students and teachers across the campus in erupting in cheers when Dr. Jacobs made the special announcement.

Moak received a bouquet of flowers from her husband and hugs from her three children, who also surprised her at the celebration.

"Leah Moak exemplifies what all of our Bellflower Unified teachers stand for -- dedication to ensuring our students achieve their very best," Jacobs said. "She inspires her students daily and her colleagues continually, lifting all of us to achieve that same standard of excellence."

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Standard of Excellence; Nothing Less

Bellflower Unified School District provides a pathway for all students to attain the expertise and develop skills of academic excellence that will empower them to become lifelong active learners, demonstrate respect for themselves and others in a dynamic, diverse and global society, become responsible, informed, productive, independent and contributing citizens, and perform successfully in their chosen field and in society.



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Moak said the award is an affirmation of the efforts she takes to plan engaging lessons.

"I feel really lucky to be able to do what I do. It's not a job, it's my passion," she said.

Moak is known for her creative approach. For example, she introduced an exploration of special projects for homeschooled students enrolled in Friday enrichment classes at Las Flores, one of the academy's extra-curricular efforts.

Called "Genius Hour," the program is modeled on Google's highly successful employee motivational tool. At Google, associates get to decide on their own projects for 20 percent of their time, a chance to let their creativity leap past workplace boundaries. The effort led to such innovations as Gmail.

Moak and her colleagues used the idea to teach lessons in research, critical thinking and resourcefulness. Students each created a driving question and then conducted research that led to a product. At the end of the semester, they gave presentations on their products.

Zylla said the "Genius Hour" program and lessons led by Moak on comparative anatomy and engineering have revitalized Las Flores' science, technology, engineering, art and math (STEAM) program. Students are currently working on an engineering lesson that will end with them constructing a pinball machine.

Moak also guides new teachers and trains colleagues during the year and summer. She invites critiques of her own classroom efforts.

"When the district first implemented instructional coaches in 2009, Leah was one of the first people to welcome the coaches into her classroom. She eagerly observed demonstration lessons, participated in planning sessions and welcomed feedback," Zylla said. "She readily receives feedback and acts upon it immediately in her quest to deliver top-notch instruction to her students."

PHOTOS

BUSD_TOY_1: Las Flores Home Independent Study Academy teacher Leah Moak shares a hug with Superintendent Dr. Brian Jacobs after learning she has been named the District's 2017 Teacher of the Year on May 10.

BUSD_TOY_2: Las Flores Home Independent Study Academy teacher Leah Moak's sixth-grade students cheer her selection as the District's 2017 Teacher of the Year on May 10.

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